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SUBJECT: O TV: A RISING STAR IN THE ARAB MEDIA MARKET

Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

11. (U) Summary: On March 16, A/IO met with Yasmine Abdullah Attia, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Egyptian youth entertainment channel O TV, which celebrated its one-year anniversary on January 31, 2008. In slightly more than one year, O TV has rocketed into the top 10 most watched entertainment channels in the Arab world, bypassing the Lebanese Broadcast Channel (LBC) and Dubai 1 in total viewers. While maintaining its focus on entertainment and cultural variety shows, O TV has begun to branch out with documentaries on international topics such as Darfur and an economic program on the Egyptian stock exchange. Most significantly, O TV indicated a willingness to explore cooperative television projects with the U.S. government that would highlight the lives of Egyptian students and immigrants living in America. End summary.

Enter O TV

12. (SBU) On March 16, A/IO met with Yasmine Abdullah Attia, the youthful CEO of the Egyptian youth entertainment channel O TV. After a year in business, O TV has exploded onto the Arab media scene, rising to the 10th most watched entertainment channel in the region and surpassing such stalwarts as LBC and Dubai 1. Abdullah attributed O TV's success to its focus on programming that is both unconventional and targeted to a younger audience. The programming philosophy of O TV is to avoid politics and focus on what is "cool, outside the box, and shows Egypt to be modern." O TV is perhaps best known for screening American and European movies with little to no censorship -- a rarity in Egypt and the wider Middle East -- but a big draw for viewers. 65-70% of the programming on O TV is original. The most popular programs, Sabah Sukar (Good Morning) and Masaa Sukar (Good Evening), are distinctive in their use of Egyptian colloquial slang and innovative set designs. O TV also inaugurated the first daily program focused on the Egyptian stock market, which has expanded the channel's viewers to include members of the Egyptian business and investor communities.

13. (SBU) O TV is the project of owner Naguib Sawaris, the richest man in Egypt. His business empire includes Mobinil and several international telecom ventures and Orascom Construction. He recently sold Orascom Cement to Lafarge for \$12.9 billion. Sawaris takes an active interest in the channel, micromanaging its programming down to the guests on O TV's talk shows. To manage O TV, Sawaris appointed Yasmine Abdullah Attia, who at the age of 32 is not only the youngest CEO of any television station in Egypt, but the only woman occupying that position as well. A former national tennis champion, Abdullah lived in the United States for a year for tennis school in Texas. Upon her retirement from tennis, Abdullah worked as a presenter on Dream TV, the Egyptian Space Channel and most recently on Channel 2's popular talk program Beit Beitak until her sacking by the Minister of Information for undisclosed reasons. Despite having no background in business administration, Abdullah

was appointed CEO and Managing Director of O TV, giving her control of personnel and programming.

¶4. (U) With only 450 employees, O TV is small compared to either the state run media (Egypt TV has 7,000 employees) or other independent stations like Dream TV (730 employees). When the station began its operations, Abdullah made a conscious decision to recruit new television talent through open casting calls. As a group, the 450 employees of O TV are young and inexperienced; only two had ever appeared on camera before joining the station. Abdullah said that O TV pays better than rivals Dream TV and Orbit TV. While the station has not yet turned a profit, Abdullah says its operating budget is sufficient until the station can renegotiate the fixed advertising revenue contract it signed onto when it began. Given the station's expanding market share and its wealthy patron, O TV is positioned to be a formidable regional media player.

¶5. (U) O TV is seeking to expand the production of its original content to include documentaries on topics such as Darfur and the screening of independent short movies from young Egyptian movie makers. O TV is also looking to acquire additional television channels that would focus exclusively on movies (O TV Cinema) and music. Asked if O TV had any interest in pursuing programming production opportunities in the U.S., Abdullah was receptive to cooperative television projects with the Embassy focusing on the lives of Egyptian students and immigrants and their experiences in America.

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